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Happiness Filled the Space of Sadness: the Weight, Tragedy and Paradox of Milan Kundera's Freedom

**Jeremy Wattles
The University of Edinburgh**

Milan Kundera's choice to open his novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984) with two short chapters discussing Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of eternal recurrence is, if nothing else, unconventional. It foregrounds his engagement with Nietzsche and suggests that the novel itself is something of a thought experiment, a working out of how such an abstract but compelling idea can have meaning in the world. The myth of eternal return¹ poses, as Kundera's narrator implies, an ultimate question of existence: will we choose that our lives, and therefore our actions, have weight or lightness? Or, as Nietzsche says in *The Gay Science* (1882), "If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this again and innumerable times again' would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight!" (194). In other words, will this thought enslave an individual or will it empower them? Is there a paradoxical, controlling freedom an individual may obtain by embracing the vicissitudes of life, in willing that a chance event and its consequences might recur again and again?

Kundera's question, which recasts the old ethical and philosophical query "What makes a life go best?" into the weight/lightness dichotomy, also recalls Nietzsche's revaluation of morals in his *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887). Like Nietzsche, Kundera asks his reader to question the moral standards of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Enlightenment—essentially the two movements upon which Western civilization has founded itself. Another thinker whose work will illuminate this discussion is Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) offers fruitful intersections with the libidinal themes in Kundera's novel. Freud's book also draws on an understanding of Nietzsche, and Keith Ansell-Pearson's introduction to Nietzsche's *Genealogy* suggests that Freud owes a debt to the *Genealogy* (Nietzsche 1994: xvi).² Freud's meditations on mankind's repressed instincts, like Nietzsche's condemnation of asceticism and Kundera's questioning of the concept of lightness, point toward a tripartite connection that I will explore.

Kundera, as well as Nietzsche and Freud, is concerned not only with the potential for self-liberation, but humanity's uneasy relationship with society. As far back as Montaigne's discussion of cannibalism in the sixteenth century, Western philosophy has wondered "What is humanity's true state of nature?" Furthermore, what is lost or gained when an individual gives up some of their freedom to society? Nietzsche would argue that civilization's control has stunted humanity's will to power; Freud would say that civilization's constricting rules, coupled with our destructive urges, have made us neurotic. Sometimes Kundera's philosophical stance seems to echo Freud's fatalistic assertion that psychotherapy can, at best, "transform hysterical misery into common unhappiness" (qtd. in Pinker 2005: 4). Kundera takes his critique of morality and insistence on material being from Nietzsche, but Tomas and Tereza are hardly "blonde beasts" reveling in Dionysian profusion and hierarchy; rather, they find themselves confronting the restricting reality of Russia's invasion of Czechoslovakia, and must reconsider their notions of humanity's superiority and alleged progress. If complicity with the spurious March of Progress does not kill the individual, this stepping down from the March, which is essentially a revolt and incompatible with civilization's doctrines, may incite civilization's lethal ire. Kundera uses Tomas's dilemma of whether he will give up his bachelor ways to be with Tereza, along with the increasingly oppressive society the Russians impose, as the tangible backdrops informing his philosophical concerns. I would first like to discuss these philosophical concerns of eternal recurrence and revaluation of morality, recalling Nietzsche in particular, and then show how they work within the novel itself.

Initially, Kundera uses the concept of eternal return as a means by which he may reevaluate canonical dualities such as mind and body, heaven and earth, lightness and weight, strength and weakness. He argues for "a perspective from which things appear other than as we know them" (4). As I will show, this perspective also demands that we curb our arrogance and give up trying to dominate the world. Thus, a shameless humility and an unwavering animal love may achieve a partial freedom from totalitarianism, and apprehend that "the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become" (Kundera 5). Likewise, a narrative that loops back on itself, and ends before Tomas and Tereza's prophesied death, with them very much alive, offers a weighty

alternative to a linear, weightless narrative, an alternative to “the profound moral perversity of a world that rests essentially on the nonexistence of return” (Kundera 4).

There is a whole history of philosophy present in Kundera’s question of weight versus lightness, a whole tradition and discourse informing these deceptively short and plainspoken opening chapters. This history goes back to the ancient Greeks, but the methodology of the question and Kundera’s naming of Nietzsche calls the *Genealogy* to the fore. In his preface, Nietzsche asks us to trace the origins and constructions of our moral codes and to reevaluate our notions about them. As Lee Spinks suggests, “the methodological question poses the problem of how we determine the concept of ‘value’ in the first place...we determine [it] on the basis of *prior* values” (57, Spinks’s emphasis). Alexander Nehamas avers that Nietzsche “is not interested in providing a theory of truth” (55). Rather, the important first assertion to recognize is that our morals are historical and manmade, not absolute rules derived or divined from a deity. As Foucault argues, “the forces operating in history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but respond to haphazard conflicts” (154). As an example, Nietzsche says: “I no longer searched for the origin of evil *beyond* the world,” and then asks “under what conditions did man invent the value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves have?* Have they up to now obstructed or promoted human flourishing” (Nietzsche 5, his emphasis)? The conditions of invention, then, are haphazard conflicts, “attempt[s] to master chance through the will to power” (Foucault 155).

Historically, Kundera argues, our preference has been contrary to Foucault’s random power struggles, it has been instead towards allegedly definite truths, valued as lightness. Lightness, Parmenides believed as far back as the 6th century B.C., was positive (Kundera 5). This value judgment has had immense and diverse influence on the major monotheistic religions, Enlightenment thinkers, and Romantic philosophers and poets. It has been variously reaffirmed and extended to imply flight, freedom, salvation, transcendental unity with the sublime, and the purity and primacy of thought. This last and positive valuation of the cerebral is especially set against the negative value of the physical. In terms of modern philosophy, the divide between sensory impressions and thought begins with Descartes, who famously asserted the primacy of thought (*cogito ergo sum*) over the delusions of material experience. For Kundera to question this tradition is, therefore, in the bold Nietzschean spirit of revaluation: “the absolute absence

of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant” (5).

Turning to Nietzsche himself, he has two main targets in the *Genealogy*: Christianity, which he famously declared in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) to be “Platonism for the people” (qtd. in Spinks 40), and those philosophers, like Schopenhauer, who had “gilded, deified, and transcendentalized...the instincts of pity, self-denial, self-sacrifice...until he was left with them as...‘values as such’ [and] on the basis of which he said ‘no’ to life and to himself as well” (7). Christianity’s Platonism comes from that ancient Greek philosopher’s notions of forms, which holds that objects and beings in the empirical world are lesser derivations of their ideal and eternal templates. Platonic forms have “a greater degree of reality” (Cooper 112). This dovetails with the believer’s religious desire/hope that they will ascend to heaven. Since heaven is necessarily pure fulfillment and perfection, lightness allows for escape from a supposedly disappointing, corrupt and wretched world. Nietzsche rejects the “diabolization of nature...from whose womb man originated and to whom the principle of evil is imputed...or of existence in general, which is left standing as inherently worthless” (1994: 67). Rather, Christianity’s “*dangerous decision*...to find the world ugly and bad has made the world ugly and bad” (2001: 123, Nietzsche’s emphasis).

Likewise, those philosophers who withdraw into the supposedly liberating life of the mind, or those who become “contended, unadventurous, philistine product[s]” of European nihilism, have made a fundamental mistake (2001: xiv). Nietzsche says of himself, “I have at all times written my writings with my whole heart and soul; I do not know what purely intellectual problems are” (1969: 12). R.J. Hollingdale suggests “In a man who thinks like this, the dichotomy between thinking and feeling, intellect and passion, has really disappeared. He feels his thoughts. He can fall in love with an idea. An idea can make him ill” (1969: 12). Tomas, like Nietzsche, experiences this phenomenon when he becomes attracted to the mythic metaphor that Tereza, like Oedipus or Moses, is an abandoned child, “Tomas did not realize at the time that metaphors are dangerous. Metaphors are not to be trifled with. A single metaphor can give birth to love” (Kundera 11). Hence, the thought of eternal recurrence is literally, physically, Nietzsche’s heaviest burden; it both crushed and transformed him until he broke through his own nihilism.

Perhaps Tomas arrives at a similar place, in that Tereza has claimed his “poetic memory” and he finds it impossible to continue his bachelor lifestyle (Kundera 209). Transformation, revaluation of values such that earthly life reveals itself in its abundance, its force and flux—this is what Nietzsche hopes his readers will also experience.

Nietzsche’s philosophy then, specifically his genealogical process, exposes the weightlessness of traditional morality. The slave rebellion which produced the priestly life, and therefore Christian morality, is unwittingly beneficial in that it “gives rise to a soul and hence to knowledge of good and evil” (1994: xv). It was a revaluation of all values, but it *devalued* life. The attitude of shame and guilt toward the present life, only yearning for an afterlife (bad conscience), and the subsequent retreat from bodily and worldly existence into pure thought (asceticism), became the psychologically sickening goal of humanity. Nietzsche claims, diagnostically, “the world has been a madhouse for too long” (1994: 69)! Resisting *a priori* absolutes, Nietzsche contends that religious commandments, categorical imperatives, and their like produce psychological illness and fragmentation; they are not grounded, and must be dismantled. In the wake of genealogy’s negating move, we must confront the death of God, the failure of metaphysics and the purposelessness of the universe—in short, nihilism. This is where eternal recurrence becomes relevant. As Bernard Williams suggests, confronting the heaviest of burdens “tests your ability not to be overcome by the world’s horror and meaninglessness” (2001: xv). Rather than being overcome, one must *self-overcome*. This process requires an “intense and painful self-examination...before one can even begin to answer the demon’s question affirmatively” (Nehamas 163). One must accept the “existential challenge of commitment and engagement” with life in every moment, whether the outcome is rapturous joy or abysmal tragedy (Spinks 126). In so doing, the individual will metamorphose, becoming like Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* Zarathustra who, “in a stronger age than this mouldy, self-doubting present day...will...come to us, the redeeming man of great love and contempt” (1994: 71). In the paradoxical juxtaposition of concepts like love and contempt, and joy and tragedy, Nietzsche finds redemption. As Zarathustra exults, “Did you ever say Yes to one joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well. All things are chained and entwined together” (1969: 331-332). Relative plurality produces psychological healing and wholeness because it is grounded in the

honest admission that earthly life is contingent. To use Kundera's words, this grounding, this weight, is "an image of life's most intense fulfillment" (5).

If Kundera incorporates Nietzschean ideas into his novel and values them as positive, does he do the opposite with Freud? Take recurrence as an example—for Nietzsche it is the heaviest burden, terrifying at first, but becomes, in the book, something that authenticates and affirms human life. For Freud, recurrence/the "compulsion to repeat" is evidence for the death drive's presence in our divided psyche as well as our outward life. The death drive is inextricably intertwined with/"pressed into the service of" the upbuilding drive Eros (Freud 56). Take Tereza's recurring dreams of death as an example—they manifest what Freud might call her lack of "protection against suffering" (20) which Tomas puts her through with his several mistresses, and their effects spill over into her days where her gestures grow "abrupt and unsteady" (Kundera 21). The death drive turned outwards, Leo Bersani argues, has its "sexual components expunged," and manifests as an oceanic, aggressive force, which contributes to our unhappiness within civilization (Freud xiv). This increasingly pessimistic conception of the drives as fluid and pervasively destructive complicates the neat binary valuation of recurrence as positive and linearity as negative. One could argue that the instances of recurrence in Kundera's text have the additional negative function of reminding the reader of the inevitability of death without transcendent reward/rebirth (both generally and as regards the characters). Yet that value judgment aligns with the original perverse situation—a world that does not acknowledge the possibility of return. It is precisely this presupposition that Kundera wants to overthrow. Is it not *more* pessimistic and self-delusional to insist on the worthlessness of an earthly life? Undoubtedly Freud would agree: his "battle of the giants," Eros and Thanatos, "is what our nursemaids seek to mitigate with their lullaby about heaven" (Freud 58). As above, repetition and recurrence signal a kind of ironic joyful dread; they may be difficult realities, but they are more truthful and affirming than the alternative.

There is an important contrast between Nietzsche and Freud in that for the latter there is no apocalyptic moment where morality is revalued. While Nietzsche imagines a discrete polarity between bad conscience and the "*great noontide*" of the future where the overman will enact a joyful violence (Nietzsche 1969: 336), Freud has a fundamentally antagonistic and pessimistic opinion of humanity. He diagnoses our collective neuroses

and indicts us on anthropological grounds. Writing in the wake of World War I, he meditates on our barbarism: “*homo homini lupus* [man is a wolf to man],” and maintains that “man [i]s a savage beast that has no thought of sparing its own kind” (Freud 48). Both of these claims recall Hobbes’s brutal state of nature. He also suggests that love is impossible without aggression. Aggression “forms the basis of all affectionate and loving relations among human beings” (Freud 50). An echo of this assertion appears in Kundera’s novel when Sabina thinks to herself “there are things that can be accomplished only by violence. Physical love is unthinkable without violence” (111). This passage appears as part of the “Short Dictionary of Misunderstood Words,” and thus Sabina’s lover Franz declares oppositely “love means renouncing strength” (Kundera 112). Which definition has more weight is difficult to discern; what is more important is the weighty and recurring process of revaluation, and the “*semantic river*” of plurality it reveals, as opposed to a world which values absolute and singular definitions of words (Kundera 88). Indeed, there is often a persistent elusiveness to Kundera’s book, where valuations of all kinds may be changed from one page to the next.

Kundera’s attitude towards human waste however is not elusive. He finds waste to be another concept excluded from the purview of a linear world besotted with the “sunset of dissolution” and suggests that if God created man in his image, then God must have a “divine intestine” (4, 245). Of course this is, in the traditional sense, theologically blasphemous and untenable, and it was not until God expelled man from Paradise that he began to shit, or at least feel ashamed of his shit. Likewise, “Immediately after his introduction to disgust, he was introduced to excitement. Without shit...there would be no sexual love as we know it, accompanied by pounding heart and blinding senses” (247). Kundera’s indictment of the world’s perverse prudery aligns almost exactly with Freud’s discussion of anal eroticism and its repression in modern society. He says, “Excrement does not arouse any disgust in the child; it seems valuable to him as a part of his body that has become detached. Upbringing...will make excrement worthless, disgusting, revolting and abominable” (42). Alternatively, “there are certain peoples, even in Europe, from whom the pungent genital odours we find offensive are valuable sexual stimuli” (44). What is particularly interesting about this passage is that Freud relegates it to his footnotes, so that the form of his text mirrors the repression that he diagnoses in society. Bersani says, “there is nothing stranger...than the erotically confessional

footnotes...where [the anthropological imagination of the text] enjoys the fantasy of a mythic, prehistoric convulsing of our physical being in the passionate sniffing of a male on all fours” (Freud xiii). This convulsing of our physical being is precisely what Sabina feels when she has a “fantasy of Tomas seating her on the toilet in her bowler hat and watching her void her bowels. Suddenly her heart began to pound and, on the verge of fainting, she pulled Tomas down to the rug and immediately let out an orgasmic shout” (Kundera 247).

This is merely one example of the recurring theme of anal eroticism in the novel—shit, for Kundera, is perhaps the penultimate symbol highlighting the necessity of revaluation and eternal return. How can we call ourselves human if we deny something so fundamental to our being? As he says, “you can’t claim shit is immoral” (248). Or, if this is humanity’s conception of itself, Kundera finds it distasteful, and would rather step down into the shit, or the semantic river, than float away into the land of kitsch (“the absolute denial of shit”), totalitarianism,³ and the Grand March of Progress (248).

What does it mean to step down from humanity? It means, Kundera might argue, to see oneself as no different from or better than an animal, to shift from a linear mode of life to a circular one. This statement need not be valued negatively. Rather, “mankind’s true moral test...consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals” (Kundera 289). Contra Descartes, who made man “master and proprietor” of nature and turned animals into machines to be used/exterminated in whatever manner we see fit, Kundera shows us Nietzsche and Tereza “stepping down from the road along which mankind...marches onward” (290). They are next to each other, appearing before the narrator’s eyes again and again, Nietzsche in his moment of collapse, weeping on the neck of a horse being beaten by its “master,” and Tereza comforting her “mortally ill dog” Karenin (290). Karenin too is a locus for revaluation. A female dog with a male name,⁴ who “knew nothing about the duality of body and soul and had no concept of disgust,” (s)he surrounds Tereza and Tomas with “a completely selfless love...a life based on repetition,” and is entirely happy (Kundera 297, 298). Humanity’s love by contrast, is “a priori inferior,” and “cannot be happy; happiness is longing for repetition” (298). In a world where the unbearable lightness of being reigns supreme “there’s no particular merit in being nice to one’s fellow man...we can never establish with certainty what part of our relations with others is the result of our emotions—love, antipathy,

charity or malice—and what part is predetermined by the constant power play amongst individuals” (Kundera 289).

Thus Kundera’s enigmatic title affirms lightness only in the sense that eternal recurrence is a myth, not reality. The important revaluation is that lightness and its revealed moral perversity is unbearable, while the concept of weight, exemplified by the startling idea of eternal return, once discovered, apprehended and appreciated, is actually life-affirming and liberating. The path to this cathartic and healing conclusion necessarily requires that the individual invert traditional morality and juxtapose disparate concepts. But far from being elitist, Nietzsche, and perhaps Kundera, suggest that these apparent paradoxes will yield vital results. In Freudian terms, this revaluation helps alleviate some of the psychic discontent we feel with civilization. Ultimately, does Kundera side more with Freud than he does with Nietzsche? Freud’s gloomy analysis of our oceanic aggressive urges and inhumanity to each other, and the injustices Tereza and Tomas endure at the hands of the Soviets, put a considerable damper on Nietzsche’s optimism that the *Übermensch* must come. As Kundera says, “Real life is linked to a series of deceptions. It disappoints us with its futility” (Holmberg 25). Instead, while we may be liberated by accepting the finite moment that is our life, there is no guarantee that civilization will concur or enhance our freedom. The public and private, as the blurb on the back of Kundera’s novel attests, inevitably intertwine. We may think or will a revaluation of values, we may think or will our freedom to its uttermost, but transferring these personal desires into our public, lived, acted life is another matter altogether.

On the other hand, we might argue that Tereza and Tomas are resolved to the injustices they suffer, and have the last word over a public sphere that has tried to stamp out their individuality and self-expression. But is this really the case? Surely they did not wish to die because of a poorly maintained and malfunctioning pickup truck. The last section of the book remains a death-haunted one, even if the characters are alive at the end. Hana Pichova notes that Karenin dies, Tereza dreams that Tomas dies, and there are the stories of the regime killing pigeons and dogs (219). Furthermore, they do not have any children. Kundera therefore dispels the idyllic “illusion” of a happy ending on the collective farm, which becomes a symbol of dehumanization, death and decay, and leaves us with serious questions—will the regime succeed in eliminating freedom in

Czechoslovakia? Will the mature love Tomas has found for Tereza remain ineffable (Pichova 219-220)?

But what of the narrator, who creates the characters and directs the text (Pichova 217)? Here Nietzsche's influence returns, regains some of its lost ground, and the "mad myth" of recurrence changes into a legitimate, constituent part of the novel. If only between the covers of the book, Kundera has deposed lightness's last remaining claim to validity. Essentially, the narrator's compassion for his characters, in contrast to their treatment at the hands of the Soviets, and his cyclical manner of telling the story, in contrast to a traditional linear narrative, are formal representations of a joyful science. The narrator celebrates the truthful, weighty lives of his characters. As Hana Pichova suggests, "the narrator's choice of narratological strategies and organization reflects his desire to create a textual world that in no way resembles the oppressive world he describes thematically" (217). This "open ended structure" frees the characters on the structural level and supports the "characters' desire for freedom on the thematic level" (Pichova 217). The narrator also calls attention to his notions of moral perversions by means of the text's structural recurrences. The text's sustained and repeated indictments of lightness, kitsch, progress and totalitarianism help make these unpalatable concepts "a solid mass, permanently protuberant, [their] inanity irreparable" (Kundera 4). Michael Henry Heim's translation is exceptional—the alliterative diction sparkles, adding a formal metaphysical weight to the argument against these absurdities that would otherwise "in the sunset of dissolution...[be] illuminated by the aura of nostalgia," remaining "ephemeral" and uncondemned (Kundera 4).

Besides the obvious repetition of phrases and sentences, whether it be the book's title or Tomas's recurring image of Tereza delivered to him in a bulrush basket, prolepsis, or flash-forwards, as well as flashbacks, are prime examples of the narratological strategies Kundera uses in order to give his characters "textual freedom" (Pichova 217). Cheryl Forbes reminds us that deliberate confluences of time and space (67) take place often—a little more than a third of the way through the novel, in the middle of narrating Sabina's new life in Paris, Kundera suddenly transports us to a time three years in the future where she learns of Tomas and Tereza's deaths due to faulty breaks in the collective farm's truck (Kundera 122). The narrator renders this passage in a matter of fact tone, which compounds its strangeness for the reader. We are unsettled because

Tomas and Tereza were still intensely alive for us, and now we expect their untimely deaths. Instead, we continue through the novel without ever witnessing their deaths first-hand, or learning what they thought as they fell off that cliff, trapped in the unrepaired truck, toward the earth. This fact reveals a crucial methodological decision on the narrator's part: "he never immerses himself in the interior world of his characters, a world that is sacred to all who have once been denied freedom" (Pichova 224). The narrator remains sensitive to his characters' sovereignty, often only approximating their thoughts for the reader. Tomas and Tereza have, therefore, in a fundamental sense, retained their freedom and eluded the surrounding death. The end of the novel finds them alive, and, we could argue, using Nietzsche's phrase, "longing for nothing more fervently" than to be bound together as lovers and partners (Nietzsche 2001: 195).

The last thing Tomas tells Tereza is this: "it's a terrific relief to realize you're free, free of all missions" (Kundera 313). He is free from his obsession to "desire and discover and appropriate" the unique, intimate parts of women, and the unique bodies presented before his surgeon's scalpel (Kundera 200). This wholly cerebral, loveless obsession was his unbearable lightness, driving him forever on into a succession of women's arms, so that *einmal ist keinmal*—whatever happens once, might as well not have happened at all (Kundera 8). Having jettisoned this false positive, he crashes back to earth, transformed by the recurring claim Tereza has laid upon him. She appeared to him as no other woman had, as "a child someone had put in a bulrush basket daubed with pitch and sent downstream for [him] to fetch at the riverbank of his bed" (Kundera 6). She has the same function as Moses, founder of monotheism, that of a catalyst which precipitates a monumental revaluation of values, in this case Tomas's values. Tomas cannot help but love Tereza. Since "chance and chance alone has a message for us," it is the recurrence of this fortuitous circumstance in his mind which, once he accepts the heavy "responsibility" that she has "offer[ed] him up her life," will both crucify him and resurrect him (Kundera 48, 6). The revaluation is this: Tomas's desire for control and bachelorhood becomes weightless and careless, but surrendering to chance will be weighty and meaningful. Tereza realizes this at the end—recalling her dream where she and Tomas descend from an airplane to an airfield, where Tomas is shot and transforms into a rabbit, "it mean[t] losing all strength...one is no stronger than the other..." (Kundera 313). Thus, she experiences

...the same odd happiness and odd sadness as then. The sadness meant: we are at the last station. The happiness meant: we are together. The sadness was the form, the happiness the content. Happiness filled the space of sadness (Kundera 313-314).

Antithetical as it seems, happiness occupies, in this revaluation, a space it was previously denied; Tomas and Tereza's "*incipit tragoedia*" is counterbalanced by their newfound detachment from humanity's perverse morality (Nietzsche 2001: 195).

Thus, they best embody the myth of eternal recurrence in the novel because they have reached beyond the grave to replay their lives for us; the repetitive, non-linear narrative forces us to pay greater attention to their predicaments, their sorrows, and their joys. Their actions take on an extra, bittersweet resonance; they have accrued extra weight. Yet the price of this victory is high—they lose their lives, not naturally, but at the hands of a totalitarian regime. We remember them more distinctly than Sabina for returning to the East, to Czechoslovakia, for being "crushed to a pulp," for choosing to stay with each other instead of seeking any one of their "infinite number of unconsummated loves" (Kundera 122, 34). Conversely, Sabina remains mired in "emptiness" and "betrayal," and wants "her dead body to be cremated and its ashes thrown to the wind" (Kundera 122). She wishes to "die under the sign of lightness," and so she will, moving farther West as the novel progresses, ultimately disappearing from the narrative (Kundera 273). What remains of Sabina? Not even kitsch.

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¹ There is a long and heated critical debate concerning whether eternal recurrence is cosmologically true. For the sake of brevity, since recent scientific research finds this argument improbable, and since Kundera treats it as a myth, I will do the same. See also Spinks pg. 129.

² Nehamas also makes this conclusion, noting that the *Genealogy*, specifically Essay II, 16 “anticipates not only Freud’s pessimistic conclusions...but also the very reasoning that led Freud to them” (247).

³ The controversy over Tomas’s newspaper article on Oedipus, and the regime’s subsequent pressure upon him, may be read as an example of the law of the father(land) punishing its son for revolting. Even without such a strict Freudian interpretation, there is a repetitive engagement with the Oedipal story throughout the novel.

⁴ See pg. 238-239, where Kundera’s mention of hermaphroditism corresponds closely to Freud’s assertion that “Man too is an animal with an unequivocally bisexual disposition” (42).